DISCIPLINE

And Other Essays

FROM THE COLLECTED WORKS

OF

WILLIAM GRAHAM SUMNER

NEW HAVEN: YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS

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WILLIAM F. HARRIS, JR.

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DISCIPLINE

IT occurs very frequently to a person connected as a teacher with a great seat of learning to meet persons who, having completed a course of study and having spent a few years in active life, are led to make certain reflections upon their academical career. There is a great uniformity in the comments which are thus made, so far as I have heard them, and they enforce upon me certain convictions. I observe that an academical life is led in a community which is to a certain extent closed, isolated, and peculiar. It has a code of its own as well for work as for morals. It forms a peculiar standpoint, and life, as viewed from it, takes on peculiar forms and peculiar colors. It is scarcely necessary to add that the views of life thus obtained are distorted and incorrect.

I should not expect much success if I should undertake to correct those views by description in words. It is only in life itself, that is, by experience, that men correct their errors. They insist on making experience for themselves. They delude themselves with hopes that they are peculiar in their persons and characters, or that their circumstances are peculiar, and so that in some way or other they can perpetrate the old faults and yet escape the old penalties. It is only when life is spent that these delusions are dispelled and then the power and the opportunity to put the acquired wisdom to practice is gone by. Thus the old continually warn and preach and the young continually disregard and suffer.

Although I could not expect better fortune than others if I should thus preach, yet there are some things which, as I have often been led to think, young men in your situation might be brought to understand with great practical

advantage, and which, if you did understand them, and act upon them, would save you from the deepest self-reproach and regret which I so often hear older men express; and the present occasion seems a better one than I can otherwise obtain, for presenting those things. I allude to some wider explanations of the meaning and purpose of academical pursuits. I do not mean theories of education about which people dispute, but I mean the purposes which any true education has in view, and the responsibilities it brings with it. It surely is not advisable that men of your age should pursue your education as a mere matter of routine, learning prescribed lessons, performing enforced tasks, resisting, unintelligent, and uninterested. Such an experience on your part would not constitute any true education. It would not involve any development of capability in you. It could only render you dull, fond of shirking, slovenly in your work, and superficial in your attainments. Unless I am greatly mistaken, some counteraction to such a low and unworthy conception of academical life may be secured by showing its relation to real life, and attaching things pursued here to practical and enduring benefits. I have known men to get those benefits without knowing it; and I believe that you would get them better if you got them intelligently, and that you would appreciate them better if you got them consciously.

In the first place, it will be profitable to look at one or two notions in regard to the purpose of education which do not seem to be sound. One is that it is the purpose of education to give special technical skill or dexterity and to fit a man to get a living. We may admit at once that the object of study is to get useful knowledge. It was, indeed, the error of some old systems of academical pursuits that they gave only a special dexterity and that too in such a direction as the making of Greek and Latin verses, which is a mere accomplishment and not a very good one

at that. It must be ranged with dancing and fencing; it is not as high as drawing, painting, or music. There is, moreover, a domain in which special technical training is proper. It is the domain of the industrial school, for giving a certain theoretical knowledge of persons who will be engaged for life in the mechanic arts. With this limitation, however, we have at once given to us the bounds which preclude this notion from covering the true conception of an academic career. It does not simply provide technical training for a higher class of arts which require longer preparation. You know that this conception is widely held through our American community, and that it is laid down with great dogmatic severity by persons who sometimes, unfortunately, are in a position to turn their opinions into law. It is one of the great obstacles against which all efforts for higher education amongst us have to contend.

I pass on, however, to another opinion just now much more fashionable and held by people who are, at any rate, much more elegant than the supporters of the view just mentioned, that is, the opinion that what we expect from education is "culture." Culture is a word which offers us an illustration of the degeneracy of language. If I may define culture, I have no objection to admitting that it is the purpose of education to produce it; but since the word came into fashion, it has been stolen by the dilettanti and made to stand for their own favorite forms and amounts of attainments. Mr. Arnold, the great apostle, if not the discoverer, of culture, tried to analyze it and he found it to consist of sweetness and light. To my mind, that is like saying that coffee is milk and sugar. The stuff of culture is all left out of it. So, in the practice of those who accept this notion, culture comes to represent only an external smoothness and roundness of outline without regard to intrinsic qualities.

We have got so far now as to begin to distinguish different kinds of culture. There is chromo culture, of which we heard much a little while ago, and there is bouffe culture, which is only just invented. If I were in the way of it, I should like to add another class, which might be called sapolio culture, because it consists in putting a high polish on plated ware. There seems great danger lest this kind may come to be the sort aimed at by those who regard culture as the end of education.

A truer idea of culture is that which regards it as equivalent to training, or the result of training, which brings into intelligent activity all the best powers of mind and body. Such a culture is not to be attained by writing essays about it, or by forming ever so clear a literary statement or mental conception of what it is. It is not to be won by wishing for it, or aping the external manifestations of it. We men can get it only by industrious and close application of the powers we want to develop. We are not sure of getting it by reading any number of books. It requires continual application of literary acquisitions to practice and it requires a continual correction of mental conceptions by observation of things as they are. For the sake of distinguishing sharply between the true idea of culture and the false, I have thought it better to call the true culture discipline, a word which perhaps brings out its essential character somewhat better.

Here let me call your attention to one very broad generalization on human life which men continually lose sight of, and of which culture is an illustration. The great and heroic things which strike our imagination are never attainable by direct efforts. This is true of wisdom, glory, fame, virtue, culture, public good, or any other of the great ends which men seek to attain. We cannot reach any of these things by direct effort. They come as the refined result, in a secondary and remote way, of thousands of

acts which have another and closer end in view. If a man aims at wisdom directly, he will be very sure to make an affectation of it. He will attain only to a ridiculous profundity in commonplaces. Wisdom is the result of great knowledge, experience, and observation, after they have all been sifted and refined down into sober caution, trained judgment, skill in adjusting means to ends.

In like manner, one who aims at glory or fame directly will win only that wretched caricature which we call notoriety. Glory and fame, so far as they are desirable things, are remote results which come of themselves at the end of long and repeated and able exertions.

The same holds true of the public good or the "cause," or whatever else we ought to call that end which fires the zeal of philanthropists and martyrs. When this is pursued directly as an immediate good, there arise extravagances, fanaticisms, and aberrations of all kinds. Strong actions and reactions take place in social life, but not orderly growth and gain. The first impression no doubt is that of noble zeal and self-sacrifice, but this is not the sort of work by which society gains. The progress of society is nothing but the slow and far remote result of steady, laborious, painstaking growth of individuals. The man who makes the most of himself and does his best in his sphere is doing far more for the public good than the philanthropist who runs about with a scheme which would set the world straight if only everybody would adopt it.

This view cuts down a great deal of the heroism which fills such a large part of our poetry, but it brings us, I think, several very encouraging reflections. The first is that one does not need to be a hero to be of some importance in the world. Heroes are gone by. We want now a good supply of efficient workaday men, to stand each in his place and do good work. The second reflection to which we are led is that we do not need to be straining our eyes

continually to the horizon to see where we are coming out, or, in other words, we do not need to trouble ourselves with grand theories and purposes. The determination to do just what lies next before us is enough. The great results will all come of themselves and take care of themselves. We may spare ourselves all grand emotions and heroics, because the more simply and directly we take the business of life, the better will be the result. The third inference which seems to be worth mentioning is that we come to understand the value of trifles.

All that I have said here about wisdom, fame, glory, "public good," as ends to be aimed at, holds good also of culture. It becomes a sham and affectation when we make it an immediate end, and comes in its true form only as a remote and refined result of long labor and discipline.

Before I speak of it, however, in its direct relation to education, let me introduce one other observation on the doctrine I have stated that we cannot aim at the great results directly. That is this: the motive to all immediate efforts is either self-interest or the desire to gratify one's tastes and natural tendencies. I say that all the grand results which make up what we call social progress are the results of millions of efforts on the part of millions of people, and that the motive to each effort in the heart of the man who made it was the gratification of a need or a tendency of his nature. I know that some may consider this a selfish doctrine, eliminating all self-sacrifice and martyr or missionary spirit, but to me it is a pleasure to observe that we are not at war with ourselves, and that the intelligent pursuit of our best good as individuals is the surest means to the good of society. Moreover, do you imagine that if you set out to make the most of yourself in any position in which you are placed, that you will have no chance for self-sacrifice, and no opportunity of martyrdom offered you? Do you think that a man who

employs thoroughly all the means he possesses to make his one unit of humanity as perfect as possible, can do so without at every moment giving and receiving with the other units about him? Do you think that he can go on far without finding himself stopped by the question whether his comrades are going in the same direction or not? Will he not certainly find himself forced to stand against a tide which is flowing in the other direction? It will certainly be so. The real martyrs have always been the men who were forced to go one way while the rest of the community in which they lived were going another, and they were swept down by the tide. I promise you that if you pursue what is good for yourself, you need not take care for the good of society; I warn you that if you pursue what is good, you will find yourself limited by the stupidity, ignorance, and folly of the society in which you live; and I promise you also that if you hold on your way through the crowd or try to make them go with you, you will have ample experience of self-sacrifice and as much martyrdom as you care for.

Now, if I have not led you too deep into social philosophy, let us turn again to culture. We find that culture comes from thought, study, observation, literary and scientific activity, and we find that men practice these for gain, for professional success, for immediate pleasure, or to gratify their tastes. The great motive of interest provides the energy and this culture is but a secondary result. It is a significant fact to observe that when the motive of interest is removed, culture becomes flaccid and falls into dilletantism.

I think that we have gained a standpoint now from which we can study undergraduate life and make observations on it which have even scientific value. During an undergraduate career, the motive of interest in each successive step is wanting. There is no immediate object of

pleasure or gain in the lesson to be learned next. Only exceptionally is it true that the learning of the lesson will gratify a taste or fill a desire. The university honors are only artificial means of arousing the same great motive, which is in the social body what gravitation is in physics. The penalties which are here to be dreaded are but imitations of life's penalties. I think that many who have undertaken to give advice and rebuke and warning to young men in a state of pupilage have failed because they have not fully analyzed or correctly grasped this fact, that the academical world is a little community by itself in which the great natural forces which bind older men to sobriety and wisdom act only imperfectly. Life is far less interesting when the successive steps are taken under compulsion or for a good which is remote and only known by hearsay, than it is when every step is taken for an immediate profit. I doubt very much whether the hope of culture or self-sacrificing zeal for the public good would make older men toil in lawyer's offices and counting-houses, unless there were such immediate rewards as wealth and professional success. In real life it is true that men must do very many things which are disagreeable and which they do not want to do, but there too the disagreeable things are made easier to bear. The troubles of academical life seem to be arbitrary troubles, inflicted by device of foolish or malicious men. Troubles of that kind always rouse men to anger and rankle in their hearts. But there is no railing against those ills of life which are inherent in the constitution of things. A man who rails at those is laughed at. So the man just emancipated from academical life finds himself freed from conventional rules but subjected to penalties for idleness and extravagance and folly infinitely heavier than any he has been accustomed to, and inflicted without warning or mercy or respite. On the other hand, he finds that life presents opportunities and attrac-

tions for him to work, where work has a zest about it which comes from contact with living things. His academical weapons and armor are stiff and awkward at first and he may very probably come to despise them, but longer experience will show that his education, if it was good, gave him rather the power to use any weapons than special skill in the use of particular ones. Special technical skill always tends to routine. Although it is an advantage in itself, it may under circumstances become a limitation. The only true conception of a "liberal" education is that it gives a broad discipline to the whole man, which uses routine without being conquered by it and can change its direction and application when occasion requires.

This brings me then to speak of the real scope and advantage of a disciplinary education. A man who has enjoyed such an education has simply had his natural powers developed and reduced to rule, and he has gained for himself an intelligent control of them. Before an academical audience it is not necessary for me to stop to clear away the popular notions about untutored powers and self-made men. It is enough to say that the "self-made" man is, by the definition, the first bungling essay of a bad workman. An undeveloped human mind is simply a bundle of possibilities. It may come to much or little. If it is highly trained by years of patient exercise, judiciously imposed, it becomes capable of strict and methodical action. It may be turned to any one of a hundred tasks which offer themselves to us men here on earth. It may have gained this discipline in one particular science or another, and it may have special technical acquaintance with one more than another. Such will almost surely be the case, but there is not a more mistaken, one-sided, and mischievous controversy than that about *the* science which should be made the basis of education. Every science has, for disciplinary purposes, its advantages and its limitations. The man who

is trained on chemistry will become a strict analyst and will break up heterogeneous compounds of all kinds, but he will be likely also to rest content with this destructive work and to leave the positive work of construction or synthesis to others. The man who is trained on history will be quick to discern continuity of force or law under different phases, but he will be content with broad phases and heterogeneous combinations such as history offers, and will not be a strict analyst. The man who is trained on mathematics will have great power of grasping purely conceptional relations, or abstract ideas, which are, however, most sharply defined; but he will be likely to fasten upon a subordinate factor in some other kind of problem, especially if that factor admits of more complete abstraction than any of the others. The man who is trained on the science of language approaches the continuity and development of history with a guiding thread in his hand, and his comparisons, furnishing stepping-stones now on the right and now on the left, lead him on in a course where induction and deduction go so close together that they can hardly be separated; but the study of language again always threatens to degenerate into a cram of grammatical niceties and a fastidiousness about expression, under which the contents are forgotten. Now, in individual affairs, family, social, and political affairs, all these powers of mind find occasion for exercise. They are needed in business, in professions, in technical pursuits; and the man best fitted for the demands of life would be the man whose powers of mind of all these diverse orders and kinds had all been harmoniously developed. How shallow then is the idea that education is meant to give or can give a mass of monopolized information, and how important it is that the student should understand what he may expect and what he may not expect from his education. As your education goes on, you ought to gain in your power of

observation. Natural incidents, political occurrences, social events, ought to present to you new illustrations of general principles with which your studies have made you familiar. You ought to gain in power to analyze and compare, so that all the fallacies which consist in presenting things as like, which are not like, should not be able to befog your reason. You ought to become able to recognize and test a generalization, and to distinguish between true generalizations and dogmas on the one hand, or commonplaces on another, or whimsical speculations on another. You ought to know when you are dealing with a true law which you may follow to the uttermost; when you have only a general truth; when you have an hypothetical theory; when you have a possible conjecture; and when you have only an ingenious assumption. These are most important distinctions on either side. Some people are affected by a notion, fashionable just now, that it belongs to culture never to go too far. Mr. Brook, in "Middlemarch," you remember, is a type of that culture. He believed in things up to a certain point and was always afraid of going too far. We have a good many aspirants after culture nowadays whose capital consists in a superficial literary tradition and the same kind of terror of going too far. They would put a saving clause in the multiplication table, and make reservations in the rule of three. On the other hand, we have those who can never express anything to which they are inclined to assent without gushing. A simple opinion must be set forth in a torrent fit to enforce a great scientific truth. One is just as much the sign of an imperfect training as the other, and you meet with both, as my description shows, in persons who pride themselves on their culture. I will not deny that they are cultivated; I only say that they are not well disciplined, that is, not well educated.

Your education, if it is disciplinary, ought also to teach

you the value of clear thinking, that is, of exact definitions, clear propositions, well-considered opinions. What a flood of loose rhetoric, distorted fact, and unclear thinking is poured out upon us whenever a difficult question falls into popular discussion! You cannot find that people who assume to take part in the discussion have a clear definition in their minds of even what they conceive the main terms in the discussion to mean. They do not seem able to make a proposition which will bear handling so as to see what it is, and whether it is true or not. They cannot analyze even such facts as they have collected, and hence cannot draw inferences which are sound. It needs but little discussion of any great political or social question to show instances of this, and to show the immense importance of having in the community men of trained and disciplined intellects, who can think with some clearness and resist plain confusion of terms and thought. For instance, I saw the other day a long argument on an important public topic which turned upon the assertion and belief on the part of the writer that a mathematical ratio and a subjective opinion were things of the same nature and value. Perhaps, when he was at school, his father thought there was no use in studying algebra and geometry. It would not make so much difference if he would not now meddle with things for which he did not prepare himself, but it is this kind of person who is the pest of every science, traversing it with his whims and speculations; and perhaps I feel the more strongly the importance of this point because the political, economic, and social sciences suffer from the want of high discipline more than any others.

I ought not to pass without mention here the mischief which is done in every science by its undisciplined advocates who, while admitted to its inner circle, distract its progress and throw it into confusion by neglect of strict principles, by incorrect analyses or classifications, or by

flinching in the face of fallacies. They render the ranks unsteady and delay the march, and the reason is because they have never had rigorous discipline either before or since they enlisted.

If your education is disciplinary, it ought also to teach you how to organize. I add this point especially because I esteem it important and it is rarely noticed. It is really a high grade of discipline which enables men to organize voluntarily. If men begin to study and think, they move away from tradition and authority. The first effect is to break up and dissolve their inherited and traditional opinions as to religion, politics, and society. This is a necessary process of transition from formal and traditional dogma to intelligent conviction. It applies to all the notions of religion, as has often been noticed, but it applies none the less to politics and to one's notions of life. The commonplaces of patriotism, the watchwords of parties and tradition, the glib and well-worn phrases and terms have to be analyzed again, and under the process much of their dignity and sanctity evaporates. So too one's views of life, of the meaning of social phenomena, and of the general rules for men to pursue with each other, undergo a recasting. Now during this process, men diverge and break up. They do not agree. They differ by less and more, and also by the various recombinations of the factors which they make. Pride, vanity, and self-seeking come in to increase this divergence, it being regarded as a sign of independence of thought.

It is not too much to say that so long as this divergence exists, it is a sign of a low and imperfect development of science. If pride and vanity intermingle, they show that discipline has not yet done its perfect work. It is only on a higher stage of culture or discipline that self is so overborne in zeal for the scientific good that opinions converge and organization becomes possible. But you are well

aware that without organization we men can accomplish very little. It is not the freedom of the barbarian who would rather live alone than undergo the inevitable coercion of the neighborhood of others that we want. We want only free and voluntary coördination, but it belongs to discipline itself to teach us that we must have coördination in order to attain to any high form of good.

I have now tried to show you the scope, advantages, and needs of a disciplinary education. I have one remark more to make in this connection. A man with a well-disciplined mind possesses a tool which he can use for any purpose which he needs to serve. I do not consider it an important question by the study of what sciences he shall get this discipline, for, if he gets it, the acquisition of information in any new department of learning will be easy for him, and he will be strong, alert, and well equipped for any exigency of life.

Before quitting the subject, I desire to point out its relation to one other matter, that is, to morals, or manners. It is a common opinion that the higher man attains, the freer he becomes. A moment's reflection will show that this is not true — but rather quite the contrary. The rowdy has far less restraints to consider than the gentleman. "Noblesse oblige" was perverted in its application, perhaps, before the Revolution, but it contains a sound principle and a great truth. The higher you go in social attainments, the greater will be the restraints upon you. The gait, the voice, the manner, the rough independence, of one order of men is unbecoming in another. Education above all brings this responsibility. Discipline in manners and morals does not belong to the specific matter of education, but it follows of itself on true education. The educated man must work by himself without any overseer over him. He finds his compulsion in himself and it holds him to his task longer and closer than any external compulsion.

This responsibility to self we call honor, and it is one of the highest fruits of discipline when discipline, having wrought through intellect, has reached character. Honor falls under the rule which I mentioned early in this lecture. You cannot reach it because you want it. You cannot reach it by direct effort. It cannot be taught to you as a literary theory. True honor can only grow in men by the long practice of conduct which is good and noble under motives which are pure. We laugh at the artificial honor of the Middle Ages and despise that of the dueling code, but let us not throw away the kernel with the shell. Honor is a tribunal within one's self whose code is simply the best truth one knows. There are no advocates, no witnesses, and no technicalities. To feel one's self condemned by that tribunal is to feel at discord with one's self and to sustain a wound which rankles longer and stings more deeply than any wound in the body. It is the highest achievement of educational discipline to produce this sense of honor in minds of young men, which gives them a guide in the midst of temptation and at a time when all codes and standards seem to be matter of opinion. I have said some things about lack of discipline in thought and discussion, but that is nothing compared with the lack of discipline in conduct which you see in a man who has never known what honor is, whose whole moral constitution is so formless and flabby that it can perform none of its functions, and who is continually seeking some special plea, or sophistry, or deceptive device for paying homage to the right while he does the wrong. Education ought to act against all this and in favor of a high code of honor, not simply the education of schools and academies, but that together with the education of home and family. Our great educational institutions ought to have an atmosphere of their own and impose traditions of their own, for the power which controls in the academic community is not the voice of

authority but the voice of academic public opinion. That might root out falsehood and violence and meanness of every kind, which no penalties of those in authority could ever reach; and I submit that such a public opinion would be becoming in a body of young men of good home advantages and the best educational opportunities the country affords. Call it high training, or culture, or discipline, or high breeding, or what you will, it is only the sense of what we owe to ourselves, and it is greater and greater according to our opportunities.

PURPOSES AND CONSEQUENCES

The observation that motives and purposes have nothing to do with consequences is a criterion for distinguishing between the science of society and the views, whims, ideals, and fads which are current in regard to social matters, but especially for distinguishing between socialism and sociology. Motives and purposes are in the brain and heart of man. Consequences are in the world of fact. The former are infected by human ignorance, folly, self-deception, and passion; the latter are sequences of cause and effect dependent upon the nature of the forces at work. When, therefore, a man acts, he sets forces in motion, and the consequences are such as those forces produce under the conditions existing. They are entirely independent of any notion, will, wish, or intention in the mind of any man or men. Consequences are facts in the world of experience. If one man discharges a gun at another and kills him, he may say afterwards that he "did not know that it was loaded." He did not mean to kill. The consequences remain; they are such as follow from the structure of a gun, the nature of explosives, and the relative adjustment of the men and the things. Of course this proposition is so simple and obvious that no demonstration can add to it. Why is there any such thing as wisdom, unless there is a distinction between a correct and an incorrect apprehension of existing conditions and of the effects which certain forces will produce? How could anybody ever make a "mistake" if his purposes would determine the conse-

quences of his acts? Why should we try to get experience of life and to know how to act under given circumstances, unless it is because the causes and effects will follow their own sequences and we, instead of controlling them by our mental operations, are sure to be affected by them in our interests and welfare? Why, in short, is there any need of education if things in this world will follow our motives and purposes — since education aims to inform us of the order of things in this world to which we are subject?

Since consequences are entirely independent of motives and purposes, ethics have no application to consequences. Ethics apply only to motives and purposes. This is why the whole fashion, which is now so popular and which most people think so noble, of mixing ethics into economics and politics, is utterly ignorant and mischievous. All policies are deliberate choices of series of acts; whether we wish good or ill, when we choose our acts, is of no importance. The only important thing is whether we know what the conditions are and what will be the effects of our acts. To act from notions, pious hopes, benevolent intentions, or ideals is sentimentalism, because the mental states and operations lack basis in truth and reality. Policies, therefore, which have not been tested by all the criteria which science provides are not to be discussed at all. Somebody's notion that they would work well and give us a gain, or that there is great need of them, because he thinks he sees a great evil at present, are no grounds of action for sober-minded men. The protective tariff is a case, so far as it is a policy of prosperity. The silver policy which was urged in 1896 and 1900 was another example. We live in the midst of a mass of illustrations of the fact that laws do not produce the consequences which the legislator intended. They give rise to other

consequences, such, namely, as the forces which they set in operation, under the conditions which exist, necessarily produce.

Acts of the legislature work on the cupidity, envy, and ambition of men; as soon as a law is passed each man affected by it takes his attitude to it. Mass phenomena result from the concurrent action of many. What results is what must result from the actions, acting as causes, under the conditions; if the actions are of a certain kind, institutions are undermined, men are miseducated, the public conscience is corrupted, false standards are set up; frivolity, idleness, love of pleasure, sycophancy, will become traits of the society. That the legislator intended to promote education, temperance, industry, and purity is entirely aside from the case. In 1899 the press of the United States constantly reiterated the assertion that the motives of the United States in the war with Spain were noble, humanitarian, and ethical, and that it never entered into expectation that the Philippine Islands were to come into our possession. All this was entirely idle; when a war is begun it will run its course and bring its consequences. What the intention was makes no difference. This, of course, is the reason why no serious statesman will enter upon a war if he can help it, or will ever engage in an adventurous policy, that is, a policy whose course and consequences are not open to his view so far as the utmost training and effort of human reason will enable him to see.

Whenever any policy is adopted, all the consequences of it must be accepted — those which are unwelcome as well as those which are welcome. This works both ways, for there are good consequences of an evil policy as well as bad consequences of a good policy. It is clear, however, that in the adoption of a policy the considerations which

should be taken into account are those which are deduced from the conditions existing and from the relations of cause and effect in the world of experience. They are not ethical at all, and the introduction of ethical notions or dogmas can never do anything but obscure the study of the facts and relations which alone should occupy attention.

The explanation of the popular confusion between motives and consequences is easy. We men are daily compelled to act. We cannot desist from activity. Therefore we have to make decisions and go forward. Hence, in our judgment of each other, if the acts turn out to have evil consequences, we have to grant excuse and indulgence to each other, if the intention was honest and the motive pure. It is no doubt necessary and right so to do, but that does not affect the reality of the consequences or the suffering and loss attendant upon them. Therefore we turn back to our educational operations, and to science, in order to learn more about the world of fact and the play of forces in it, for what we want is, not to judge or excuse each other, but to avoid suffering and loss.

Here, then, is the great gulf between all the sentimental, ethical, humanitarian, and benevolent views about social matters and the scientific view of the same. The former start out from some mental states or emotions produced by impressions from occurrences; the latter starts out from the desire to know the truth about facts and relations in the world of experience. In all the dictionaries definitions of socialism are given which try to express the sense of socialism in terms of the pious hope or benevolent intention by which socialists claim to be animated. All these definitions appear to be colored by a desire on the part of the persons who made them to give definitions

which would be satisfactory to socialists. The definitions are substantially alike. Not one of them contains an idea; that is to say, not one of them expresses a true definition, if by a definition is understood the expression in language of a single complete and well-rounded concept. An aspiration for better things is common to all philosophies and systems; it is not a definition of any one. It is a diffused sentiment and nothing more. These definitions, however, are all true to the reality of the case in one respect; they are all attempts to bring within the compass of a formula what is really a nebulous state of mind with respect to the phenomena of human society. The only positive characteristic of this state of mind is that it is one of disapproval and dislike. The suggestion of contrast with some other phenomena which would be approved and liked is, of course, a dispersion of thought to the infinite variety of subjective phantasms which might float in the imagination of an indefinite number of men. The point is, for the present purpose, that all this belongs on the side of motives, purposes, hopes, intentions, ideals, and has nothing to do with realities, forces, laws, consequences, facts, conditions, relations. The science of society finds its field in exploring the latter; it has nothing at all to do with the former. This is why it is true, although socialists are annoyed by the assertion, that socialism is not a subject for discussion by serious students of the science of society. An economist or sociologist who discusses socialism is like a physicist who discusses Jules Verne's novels. He does not prove his own breadth of mind; he proves that he does not understand the domain of his own vocation.

Poetry and other forms of the fine arts express sentiments, states of mind, and emotional reactions on experience. As new stimuli they affect the imagination

and produce new states of thought and emotion. For the greatest part their effect is dissipated and exhausted in these subjective experiences, not without residual effect on character. As motives of action, these impulses of the emotions produced by artistic devices do not stand in good repute in the experience of mankind. Why? Because they contain no knowledge or foresight, and therefore no guarantee of consequences. It belongs to education to train men and women to criticize and withstand impulses of this class. Pictures of scenes or objects, instead of inciting to action, ought to act upon an educated person as warnings to distrust the influence to which he is exposed. It is not possible to cross-examine a picture, even if it is a photograph.

A good education would, in a similar manner, teach its pupils to resist the magnetism of a crowd and the seductions of popularity. When a crowd, of which one is a member, are enthused with a common sentiment and purpose, it is impossible to resist the influence of it. Hence the well-known fact that men who act in a crowd often look back later in astonishment at their own actions; they cannot understand how they came to participate in the things which were done. Education ought to train us so that when we are in a crowd which is being swept away by a motive, we should refuse to join, and should instead go away to think over the probable consequences. In like manner popularity, which seems now to be the grand standard of action, is always to be distrusted. "Woe unto you when all men speak well of you." That is the time to take warning that you are probably going astray. It is very smooth and easy to run with the current and it involves no responsibility for the consequences. Who then will consider the consequences? They will come. All our reason, study,

science, and education are turned to scorn and ridicule if popularity is a proper and adequate motive of action.

In fact the judgment of probable consequences is the only real and sound ground of action. It is because men have been ignorant of the probable consequences, or have disregarded them, that human history presents such a picture of the devastation and waste of human energy and of the wreck of human hopes. If there is any salvation for the human race from woe and misery it is in knowledge and in training to use knowledge. Every investigation of the world in which we live is an enlargement of our power to judge of probable consequences when cases arise in which we shall be compelled to act. The difference between motives and consequences, therefore, is seen to be a gulf between the most divergent notions of human life and of the way to deal with its problems. It is most essential that all of us who believe in the scientific view of life and its problems should extricate ourselves completely from the trammels of the sentimental view, and should understand the antagonism between them, for the sentimental view has prevailed in the past and we live now in a confusion between the two.

It is a still more positive vice to act from an intention to attain ideals. Ideals are necessarily phantasms. They have no basis in fact. Generally ideals are formed under the stress of difficulty along the hard road of positive endeavor. Then the imagination takes wing and, disregarding conditions and forces, revels in constructions which are not limited by anything.[1] The ideal for mankind would be to have material supplies without limit and without labor and to reproduce without care or responsibility. Minor ideals are but details or fractions which are not worth attention. If ideals have any power or

[1] Gumplowicz, L., Staatsidee, p. 133; Soziologie und Politik, p. 110.

value, it is as easy to use them for the whole as for any part. Dogmatic ideals like perfect liberty, justice, or equality, especially if economic and not political liberty, justice, and equality are meant, can never furnish rational or scientific motives of action or starting-points for rational effort. They never can enter into scientific thinking since they admit of no analysis and can be tested by no canons of truth. They have no footing in reality. Anybody who says that "we want to build a republic of educated labor" is not defining a rational program of action. He is only manufacturing turgid phrases. He who says that the state "ought to balance the motives of interest and benevolence" is not contributing to any sober discussion. He is talking nonsense, since an analysis of "state," "interest," and "benevolence" would cause the proposition to fall into contradictions and absurdities. The vice and fallacy of this way of looking at things is that it assumes that men can by thinking things call them into being; or that men can add by thinking to the existing conditions some element which is not in them.[1] All who talk about the "power of ideas" are more or less under this fallacy. It is a relic of the sympathetic magic of savage men. Serious study of human society shows us that we can never do anything but use and develop the opportunities which are offered to us by the conditions and conjunctures of the moment.

Other motives of action are derived from the authoritative or dogmatic precepts of some sect of philosophy or religion. These are what is commonly called ethics. In the ordinary course of life it is best and is necessary that for most of us, and for all of us most of the time, these current rules of action which are traditional and

[1] Ratzenhofer, G., Die Soziologische Erkenntnis, p. 365.

accepted in our society should be adopted and obeyed. This is true, however, only because it is impossible for nearly all of us to investigate for ourselves and win personal convictions, and it is impossible for any of us to do so except in a few special matters. Nevertheless, all this sets out only in so much clearer light the pre-eminent value of science, because science extends, over the whole domain of human experience, a gradually wider and wider perception of those relations of man to earth and man to man on which human welfare depends. Science is investigation of facts by sound methods, and deduction of inferences by sound processes. The further it goes the more it enlightens us as to consequences which must ensue if acts are executed by which things and men are brought into the relations which science has elucidated. At the present moment civilized society stands at a point in the development of the applications of science to human interests, at which the thing of the highest importance is the subjection of societal phenomena to scientific investigation, together with the elimination of metaphysics from this entire domain.

POWER AND PROGRESS

In its simplest and most concrete form, social power consists in the power of an individual man to produce by his labor, from the ground, more than the subsistence of one man. Its grades and degrees follow the increasing ratio of the product to the labor. If one man can produce subsistence for a number, the population rapidly increases, a society grows up, and increases soon to great numbers. The men are "in demand," as we have expressed it before; the surplus product of those already here constitutes a supply of subsistence all ready for others, and thus measures the demand for them as an economic quantity. The greater the productive power of the members of society the more luxurious will be the life in it; existence will be broad and ample in its comfort, and all the social capital will be rapidly multiplied. The members of the society all participate in the advantage of the social capital where liberty exists, and imperfectly even where it does not exist, for not even slaves could be prevented from sharing in those facilities and advantages which are public and general in a highly civilized state. Thus the power of the individual to produce much turns into a social power.

It is a painful disillusion to find that increasing social power does not tend toward a final social condition in which rest and contentment would be found after a task finished and executed, but that the problem has only changed its form. If the society, after taking up new elements, tends toward a new equilibrium in which those new elements are to be absorbed and assimilated, the

period of change and transition is found to be the period of prosperity, expansion, and happiness. Rest and peace would mean, not quiet and unruffled enjoyment, but stagnation, routine, and decay. A new measure of energy and strength is won, but it drives us on again; we make new achievements, and get once more all the exhilaration of advancing motion; but we throw aside and lose much of our old winnings. It is never in the quiet enjoyment of rest, or in exhausting the enjoyment which comes from consuming the achievements of the past that either power or happiness is won — it is in the work of achievement, in the sense of gain and progress, in the movement and transition from one plane to another. How then is it possible to imagine that the human race will ever get its work done? If it ever stops to rest it will retrograde. It will then have its work to begin all over again. Poverty, if ever conquered and banished, will come again through the vices engendered in a world without poverty, and so the conflict with it must begin again.

The Egyptians owed their power and civilization to the fact that the Nile mud so enriched the valley every season that one man's labor could produce subsistence for many. When the population increased, the power of social maintenance was not diminished but increased. When there was a great population there, using the land with very painstaking labor according to the stage of the arts, an immense surplus was produced which raised war, statecraft, fine arts, science, and religion up to a very high plane. Then they tried to satisfy the demand for men by slaves, that is, persons who contributed to the social power to their utmost yet shared in it only under the narrowest limitations. The system, after reaching the full flower of prosperity of which it was

capable, became rigid, chiefly, as it appears, because the sanction of religion was given to the traditional and stereotyped forms. Also the power of social support which lay in the fertility of the soil had been exploited to its utmost. The arts by which more product might have been won advanced only very slowly — scarcely at all. There was hardly any emigration to new land. Hence a culmination was reached, after which there must be decline and decay. The achievements of the Egyptians were made in the period when they were growing up to the measure of the chances which they possessed.

In their case we can see a nation pass through the stages from the first to the last. Other nations, which are in full contact with the rest of the human race, undergo constantly renewed impulses to advance and they undergo periods of reaction. The phenomena are broken and confused and it is not easy to interpret them.

In the case of the individual also it is emphatically true that it is not the man who is rich who is happy; it is the man who is growing richer than he has been. Hence this great happiness is possible to all, for it is just as intense for a man who has been used to five hundred a year and is now winning eight hundred as it is to the man who has been having twenty thousand and is now winning twenty-five thousand.

Progress, therefore, means winning more social power; it goes along with increase of power and is the proof and the realization of such increase. The arts of life all contribute to the increase. Although it has been said that social power means power of an individual to produce, from the land, a surplus of subsistence beyond his own needs, yet it will not be understood that this

power is increased by agricultural improvements only; it is increased by all improvements in any department of industrial effort; it is especially increased by the extension of the cultivated area of the globe, that is, by settling new countries. This last mode of increasing social power is also the easiest.

From the increase of industrial power there follows advance in science, fine arts, literature, and education, which react again on the social power to stimulate it and accelerate the rate of its activity, thus increasing its efficiency.

The point which here seems most important is to keep the sequence and relation of things distinct and clear. The notion that progress proceeds in the first instance from intellectual or moral stimuli, or that progress is really something in the world of thought, and not of sense, has led to the most disappointing and abortive efforts to teach and "elevate" inferior races or neglected classes. The ancestors of the present civilized races did not win their civilization by any such path; they built it up through centuries of toil from a foundation of surplus material means, which they won through improvements in the industrial arts and in the economic organization.

In this connection also we are brought to another question which must be regarded as one of the most important to be clearly answered for successful discussion of social problems. It is assumed to be the task of political economy or social science to account for "the degradation of mankind," or to find out the reasons for degradation of mankind as a preliminary step toward the cure of that degradation — which latter is taken to be the task of those sciences. But we are met at once by the question: Is the degradation of

mankind a problem? There have been many schools of philosophers who have believed that men once were pure and elevated and that they have fallen into degradation; the old theologians, the classical peoples, the believers in a state of nature in which all was pure, simple, and good, all held this notion in one form or another. For any of these schools it was undoubtedly a reasonable question as to how the primitive bliss had been lost.

At present, however, we no longer start from any assumptions of that kind at all. We know as a matter of fact that mankind has never lived in any primitive golden age or stage of nature; its earliest state was a state of degradation, which was almost universal. If we could trace the history of the race further back we must believe that we should find the degradation universal. The question is not, therefore, how the race ever fell into degradation, measuring degradation from some ideal state of elevation; but, how the race ever escaped from degradation as far as it has done so, reckoning its present condition from what we know about the primitive condition of the race. The mystery is not that there is still a measure of degradation, but that there are any men who have emerged from the primitive degradation.

It is evident that the difference in these two points of view is as wide as any which could be imagined in this domain. The latter is the only one which has any warrant in the facts of our knowledge. If it is true, then all social discussion which proceeds from the other point of view is mere fiction — and if we do not know which is true, then we cannot yet make any fruitful discussion at all.

For our present purpose, then, we observe that the

possession of social power in any society or in any generation, produces social movement, with expansion, reiterated new achievement, social hope and enthusiasm, with all that we call progress; and that this movement is so directed that degradation is behind it. The problem is not to account for degradation, because if we relax our efforts we shall fall back into it. The problem is how to maintain the effort and develop the power so as to keep up the movement away from it. It is true that the movement is by no means in a direct line away from primitive barbarism, and that it is subject to retrograde movements toward degradation; also that, even on its line of advance, it meets with and seems even to produce new forms of social degradation. But the fact that the primitive barbarism is to any degree left behind, or that it is even transformed, is the commanding fact which sets our point of view for us, and determines the interpretation which we must give to all the phenomena and to all the smaller and narrower movements. If we do not master the point which is here presented we can have no social science at all.

LIBERTY AND RESPONSIBILITY

From one end to the other of history, from one extreme to the other of the social scale, we can find no status in which men realize the kind of liberty which consists in doing as one pleases, or in unrestrainedness of action. If we should go on to consider the case of the learned man, or the statesman, or the monarch, or any other class and position, we should find the same. The Emperor Nicholas of Russia, who left the reputation of a military autocrat behind, complained that his Minister took a position before the chimney, and, to everything which the Emperor proposed, simply answered: "It is not permitted to do it." Liberty to do as one pleases is not of this world, for the simple reason that all human and earthly existence is conditioned on physical facts. The life of man is surrounded and limited by the equilibrium of the forces of nature, which man can never disturb, and within the bounds of which he must find his chances.

If that seems too ponderous and abstract for the reader, it may be interpreted as follows. Man must get his living out of the earth. He must, in so doing, contend with the forces which control the growth of trees, the production of animals, the cohesion of metals in ores; he must meet conditions of soil and climate; he must conform to the conditions of the social organization, which increases the power of a body of men to extort their living from the earth, but at the price of mutual concessions and inevitable subordination. Organization means more power, but it also means constraint, and,

at every step of advancing civilization, while we seem to get nearer to this form of liberty, the means of emancipation proves a new bond. Such being the case, it is a plain delusion to suppose that we can ever emancipate ourselves from earth while we are upon it.

Yet men have, in all the higher forms of civilization, been determined that they would have this liberty. They have, as it were, determined that they would fly. They have made liberty a dream, a poetic illusion, by which to escape, at least for an hour, from the limitations of earth; they have put liberty at the beginning of all things, in the "state of nature," or far on in the future, in a millennium. Within the last century, especially, they have elaborated notions of liberty as a natural endowment, belonging to everybody, a human birthright. Their experience has been that they did not get it, and, when this clashed with the smooth doctrines in which they had been educated, they have become enraged.

Now it will be most advantageous to notice that this notion of liberty has a certain historical justification, and, when historically considered, a relative truth.

The mediæval social and political system consisted of a complex of customs and institutions such that, when we come to analyze them, and find out their philosophy, we find they imply all the time that men are, but for political institutions and social arrangements, under universal servitude. The point of departure of administration and legislation was that a man had no civil rights or social liberty, but what was explicitly conferred by competent authority, and that the sum of rights which any person had were not such as belonged generally to all members of the society, but such as each, by his struggles and those of his ancestors, had come to possess. The modern view gets its interpretation, and its

relative justification, by reference to and in antagonism to this; the doctrine of natural liberty as an antecedent status of general non-restraint was a revolt against the doctrine just stated. It meant to affirm that laws and state institutions ought to be built upon an assumption that men were, or would be but for law, not all unfree, but all free, and that freedom ought to be considered, not a product of social struggle and monarchical favor or caprice, but an ideal good which states could only limit, and that they ought not to do this except for good and specific reason, duly established. The nineteenth-century state is built on this construction. We are obliged all the time to assume, in all our studies, certain constructions, of which we say only that things act as if they were under such and such a formula, although we cannot prove that that formula is true. Institutions grow under conditions into certain forms which can be explained and developed only by similar constructions.

Modern civil institutions have been developed as if man had been, anterior to the state, and but for the state, in a condition of complete non-restraint. The notion has been expanded by the most pitiless logic, and at this moment a score, or perhaps a hundred, eager "reforms" are urged upon grounds which are only new and further deductions from it. At this point, like the other great eighteenth-century notions which are also true relatively when referred back to the mediæval notions which they were intended to combat, the notion of abstract liberty turns into an independent dogma claiming full philosophical truth and authority. In that sense, as we have seen, it is untrue to fact.

When we turn to test the dogma of liberty by history and experience, we find immediately that the practical

reason why no man can do as he likes in a human society is that he cannot get rid of responsibility. It is responsibility which fetters an autocrat, unless he is a maniac. It is that which binds the millionaire, which limits the savage who is responsible to his tribe, which draws narrow lines about the statesman, and which will just as inevitably fetter a democratic majority unless such a majority proposes social suicide. Responsibility rises up by the side of liberty, correlative, commensurate, and inevitable. Responsibility to nature is enforced by disease, poverty, misery, and death; responsibility to society is enforced by discord, revolution, national decay, conquest, and enslavement. Within the narrow limits of human institutions, liberty and responsibility are made equal and co-ordinate whenever the institutions are sound. If they are not equal and co-ordinate, then he who has liberty without responsibility incurs a corresponding loss of liberty, or servitude. Those men and classes who at any time have obtained a measure of abstract liberty to do as they like on earth, have got it in this way — at the expense of the servitude of somebody else. Thousands of men died that Napoleon Bonaparte might, in a measure, have his way; great aristocracies have won wide unrestraint by displacing the lives and property of thousands of others, when the aristocracies have been built up by a remission of responsibility.

The worst modern political and social fallacies consist in holding out to the mass of mankind hopes and affirmations of right according to which they are entitled by prerogative to liberty without responsibility. The current political philosophy, having fallen under the dominion of romanticism (except as to war and diplomacy), has apparently no power to do more than to fol-

low and furnish platitudes for the popular tendency, or to oppose all forms of liberty in the interest of socialistic equality. The prosecution of that line of criticism, however, lies aside from my present purpose.

I have now arrived at the point where the true idea of liberty, as the greatest civil good, can be brought forward. The link between liberty and responsibility can be established and upheld only by law; for this reason, civil liberty, the only real liberty which is possible or conceivable on earth, is a matter of law and institutions. It is not metaphysical at all. Civil liberty is really a great induction from all the experience of mankind in the use of civil institutions; it must be defined, not in terms drawn from metaphysics, but in terms drawn from history and law. It is not an abstract conception; it is a series of concrete facts. These facts go to constitute a status — the status of a freeman in a modern jural state. It is a product of institutions; it is embodied in institutions; it is guaranteed by institutions. It is not a matter of resolutions, or "declarations," as they seemed to think in the last century. It is unfriendly to dogmatism. It pertains to what a man shall do, have, and be. It is unfriendly to all personal control, to officialism, to administrative philanthropy and administrative wisdom, as much as to bureaucratic despotism or monarchical absolutism. It is hostile to all absolutism, and people who are well-trained in the traditions of civil liberty are quick to detect absolutism in all its new forms. Those who have lost the traditions of civil liberty accept phrases.

The questions in regard to civil liberty are: do we know what it is? do we know what it has cost? do we know what it is worth? do we know whether it is at stake?

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